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SUBJECT: CZECHS PREVIEW 2009 PRESIDENCY AGENDA FOR BALKANS

¶1. (U) The Czech Embassy hosted on May 17, 2007 in Belgrade a discussion panel on the program priorities of the Czech Republic when it assumes the EU presidency in 2009. The panel was composed of Jan Kahout, Czech Ambassador to the EU, and Dr. Tanja Miscevic, Director of the Serbian government's Office for Association with the EU. The discussion was attended by representatives of different embassies, Serbia's foreign ministry officials and citizens.

¶2. (U) On the heels of the formation of a new Serbian government, Miscevic said that the most important thing for Serbia at this moment is to revive the process of European integration in order to obtain the status of EU member candidate by the end of 2008 (a relatively new target date most recently espoused by President Tadic). She added that while it is technically possible to obtain this EU status, clear political will must also exist. To this end, she announced that her office will submit "very soon" a list of priority laws that must be passed to get Serbia back on the accession track after losing six months to elections and government formation negotiations that had stagnated progress.

¶3. (U) Following Miscevic's remarks, Kahout presented the Czech government's proposed Balkan agenda. He affirmed that the Czech Republic supports the EU's "open door" approach to potential new members, expressing hope that Serbia will have made great strides forward in its association with EU when his country takes over the EU Presidency at the beginning of 2009. Outlining the Czech Republic's priorities, Kahout said the first will be to develop and increase the competency of candidates for membership in the EU. The candidate countries, he said, must be organized and efficient in fulfilling the standards required by the EU. The EU, meanwhile, needs to face up to its own shortcomings, such as the free movement of the labor force, the treatment of other countries' citizens, the liberalization of the market when other countries have protective policies, and must above all clarify its approach to enlargement. The second priority will stress discussions on the EU budgetary allocation for agriculture - Kahout highlighted that this year's budget for agriculture is lower than in previous years. The third priority will be to increase the security of member states and protect the state order of the EU, and the final priority is institutional reform. Kahout said the Czech Embassy in Belgrade will have an energetic agenda of touring the country and communicating with NGOs and the Serbian people about the EU and European integration process in an effort to educate and build support for needed reforms.

¶4. (U) Comment: The Czechs have been first out of the gate among European neighbors in trying to refocus Serbian energy on the future, and particularly on a Euro-Atlantic future. Miscevic's statements were equally hopeful, showing a commitment - at least at a technical level - to start getting the government working on long-delayed legislation needed to get closer to Europe. This represents a good initial sign from the new government, and we will continue to engage with the right ministries to try to maintain this forward-looking, and westward-looking, focus.

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